



Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service

POST INCIDENT ANALYSIS

**Third Alarm Apartment Fire
14201 Weeping Willow Dr
Silver Spring, MD 20906**

February 17, 2012



Submitted by Battalion Chief Pete Friedman

Executive Summary

On February 17, 2012 at 1804 hours, PSCC dispatched PE725 and T725 to 14205 Weeping Willow Drive for alarm bells. As the units arrived two minutes later, the “bravo” operator advised that they had a report of a fire in 14201, and they were filling the box. PE725 went on scene with nothing initially evident, but then updated that to “smoke in the stairwell”. T725’s driver went to the rear and confirmed that there was a working fire in a lower level apartment on Side Charlie. T725 requested the RID.

BC704 arrived, assumed the command, and determined that the units from 25 were engaged in an apartment fire on the terrace level. No apartment number was on the door, but crews believed they were in apartment #2. T725 was assigned as Terrace Division supervisor.

The fire in the kitchen of the terrace apartment was knocked quickly, and the primary search in that unit was negative. BC703 positioned on Side Charlie and observed a working fire in the apartment above the apartment of origin. A task force was requested. PE721 was released from the back-up responsibility, and was assigned to the apartment above with PE703 (found to be apartment #22). While PE703 staged in the stairwell, they were enveloped in smoke banking down from the third floor, and they repositioned to apartment #32.

Smoke continued to build at the roof line, and a 2nd alarm was requested with units sent to check the attic/cockloft/roof.

The fire in apartment #22 took an extended effort as the fire continued to flare after being knocked. Crews were assigned to apartments #32 and #42, but no extension was found.

Three companies were sent to 14205 to prevent exposure to that building, but no extension was found.

At the forty-minute mark, all companies had been assigned and a 3rd alarm was requested, but none of those companies were utilized.

FEI determined the location of origin to be the gas dryer in the terrace apartment, which was later determined to be #12. The dryer vent in apartment #12 and most other units were found to have heavy build-up of lint. FEI believes that contributed to extension into the pipe chases. Damage is estimated at \$500,000 to structure and \$200,000 to contents.

Because of water damage, and the need to shut off gas and electricity, both 14201 and 14205 were condemned by FM10. Occupants of thirty-two units were displaced with an approximate count of sixty residents.

A nearby community room was established as a sheltering area for residents to work on substitute housing. Home Properties, the management company worked through the night to secure the property and begin limited restoration. Within 24 hours, sixteen units were reoccupied. Red Cross representatives were present but most residents declined their service.

Building Structure/Site Layout

The fire building is a 4 story garden apartment of mixed construction: ordinary and wood frame. It is connected to 14205 Weeping Willow Dr (exposure bravo), but separated by a masonry fire wall. An open stairwell faces the front of the building with a landing on each floor. All of the apartments are accessed via these landings.

There is also a semi-enclosed stairwell facing the rear of the building. Fire doors on each floor separate the landings from the enclosed stairway. From the front entrance, it is possible to walk through a fire door and exit to the rear of the structure. Parking is situated on side alpha and delta. A sidewalk and turf make up access to Side Charlie.



Life Safety Systems

- 14201 and 14205 share an unmonitored local alarm system.
- That system led to the first 911 call.
- No sprinkler system or standpipe is present.
- The smoke detector in the apartment of origin was activated on arrival.

Communications

- PSCC assigned PE725 and T725 to 7-B for the initial response.
- Units were directed to 7-C when the box alarm was filled. Task Force, 2nd, and 3rd alarm units were assigned to 7-D.
- There were some delays in assignments made to units on 7-D.
- In the week prior to this incident, RSM's (radio speaker mic's) had been removed from portable radios in the County because of continuing problems. Personnel from 3 and 25 were using new "XE" RSM's. Personnel without RSM's had difficulty receiving communication.
- The radio system worked well with good audio quality, and little 'honking'. VRS was activated, but no units switched to 7-N.

On Scene Operations

- Resources were inadequate in the first minutes on the scene.
- The 4th due engine was coming from a distance, which led to a delay getting to the floor above.
- Fire in apartment of origin was knocked quickly.
- Once the fire was knocked, 2nd due engine was redeployed from back-up to the floor above.
- All 16 units were searched quickly.
- The greatest volume of fire was in apartment #22 which required a lengthy fight for extinguishment.
- The aggressive attack and opening of walls in #22 limited any further travel.
- 4 aerials were positioned.
- Almost all the handlines and leader lines went from side alpha, primarily through the front stairway.
- Hoselines were managed well, with few problems noted.



Staffing

- Four-person staffing on engines was critical to the positive outcome on this incident. Because of the number of apartments that had to be checked for extension, most engines had to carry their own sections of hose, and then pull leader lines from the first engines.
- Three-person staffing on the first two trucks delayed placement of ground ladders.

Safety

- The main electrical feed for the building passed through the apartment of origin. Hose streams made contact with exposed charged cable during the initial knock.
- One firefighter had a record-only injury.
- The RIG was split between Sides Alpha and Charlie; PAT719 was reassigned from the second alarm to the RIG.

Accountability

- Interior crews were accounted for.
- Divisions and groups were dynamic; many units changed assignments during the incident.
- Transition from staging to operations was delayed by communications of units moving from 7-D to 7-C.
- Incident Management was conducted out of BC704's vehicle by BC704, C742, and DC700.

Water Supply

- Two hydrants were used.
- PE725 and PE721 shared the hydrant on the Alpha/Delta corner.
- PE703 laid out from Whispering Pines Ct and E703B picked up that hydrant.
- Had the incident gone defensive, the next hydrant was across the lanes of Bel Pre Rd
- Numerous leader lines were utilized.
- Almost all engine crews brought their "bundles" with them.



Staging

- Units from the 2nd and 3rd alarm were directed to stage.
- Most units from the 2nd alarm were assigned prior to arrival at the staging area.
- PE715 became the Staging Area Manager.

Weather

- Conditions were mild and clear with almost no wind.
- It was dusk at the time of dispatch and full darkness by the time the fire was knocked.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- Be prepared: This 3rd alarm was dispatched as alarm bells and had nothing showing on arrival.
- In garden apartment fires, it is imperative to quickly get crews into all units above the fire.
- Engines from greater alarms need to prepare for expanded water supply needs.
- Units practiced excellent positioning which left room for subsequent units.
- If a unit doesn't need to be close, leave it away from the scene.
- Command should make an explicit description of floor designations. (ie. "Starting at the top, we will have Divisions 4,3,2, and Terrace")
- On large incidents, an expanded RIG may be required. A command officer should be considered to manage the RIG(s).
- Consider where electrical feeds go. The electrical meters were on the exterior wall of the apartment of origin.
- Prior to the fire there were openings in the pipe chases that allowed easy vertical extension.
- There must be continuity in designating "2-out". If the "Known Life Hazard" threshold is met, entry can be made prior to the arrival of a "Standby Team", but that decision must be announced. If "2-out" is required, the "Standby Team" must meet requirements and be ready before crews enter the IDLH.

Chronology

<i>Time</i>	<i>Dispatch</i>	<i>Units</i>				
1804	Alarm Bells	PE725	T725			
1807	1st Alarm	PE721 AT718 BC703B DC700	PE740 RS742 C742 FM55	PE703 A740 C705D FM58	E703B BC704 SA700	AT740 BC703 EMS700
1810	RID	PAT723	RS703	M742		
1822	Task Force	E723	PE724	AT705	CT740	AR716
1832	2 nd Alarm	PE718 AT703 AR733	E705B PAT719 CP727	PE704 M742	E719 A725	AT740 CT705
1847	3 rd Alarm	PE728 T716	PE715 A721	PE707	PE716	T715

Personnel and Apparatus

- 15 Engines
 - 8 Aerials
 - 2 Rescue Squads
 - 5 EMS units
 - 122 Personnel
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